Nepali language

Nepali (English: /nɪ'pɔːli/[5]; Devanagari: नेपाली [ne'pali]) is an Indo-Aryan language of the sub-branch of Eastern Pahari. It is the official language of Nepal and one of the 22 scheduled languages of India. Also known by the endonym **Khas kura**[1] (Devanagari: खस कुरा), the language is also called **Gorkhali** or **Parbatiya** in some contexts. It is spoken mainly in Nepal and by about a quarter of the population in Bhutan.[6] In India, Nepali has official status in the state of Sikkim and in the Darjeeling Sadar subdivision and Kalimpong district of West Bengal. It has a significant number of speakers in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Uttarakhand. It is also spoken in Myanmar and by the Nepali diaspora worldwide.[7] Nepali developed in proximity to a number of Indo-Aryan languages, most notably the other Pahari languages and Maithili and shows Sanskrit influence.[8] However, owing to Nepal's location, it has also been influenced by Tibeto-Burman languages. Nepali is mainly differentiated from Central Pahari, both in grammar and vocabulary, by Tibeto-Burman idioms owing to close contact with this language group.[9]

Historically, the language was called *Khas Speech* (*Khas Kurā*), spoken by the Khas people of Karnali Region and ***Gorkhali*** (language of the Gorkha Kingdom) before the term *Nepali* was adopted.[1] The origin of modern Nepali language is believed to be from Sinja valley of Jumla. Therefore, the Nepali dialect "Khas Bhasa" is still spoken among the people of the region.[10]

Contents

- Literature
- Number of speakers
- History
- Dialects
- Phonology
  - Vowels
    - Monophthongs
    - Diphthongs
  - Consonants
- Grammar
- Writing
- Numbers
- See also
- References
- Bibliography
- Further reading
- External links

Nepali	
Gorkhali, Khaskura, Nepalese, Parbate	
नेपाली/खस कुरा	
नेपाली The word "Nepali" written in Devanagari	
Pronunciation	[ne'pali]
Native to	Nepal, India
Ethnicity	Khas[1] (historically)
Native speakers	16 million (2011 census)[2] 9 million L2 speakers (2011 census)[2]
Language family	Indo-European ▪ Indo-Iranian ▪ Indo-Aryan ▪ Northern Zone ▪ Eastern Pahari ▪ **Nepali**
Writing system	Devanagari Devanagari Braille
Signed forms	Signed Nepali
Official status	
Official language in	Nepal India (Sikkim, West Bengal)
Regulated by	Nepal Academy
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	ne (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=ne)
ISO 639-2	nep (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=322)
ISO 639-3	nep – inclusive code

Literature

Nepali developed a significant literature within a short period of a hundred years in the 19th century. This literary explosion was fueled by Adhyatma Ramayana; Sundarananda Bara (1833); Birsikka, an anonymous collection of folk tales; and a version of the ancient Indian epic *Ramayana* by Bhanubhakta Acharya (d. 1868). The contribution of trio-laureates Lekhnath Paudyal, Laxmi Prasad Devkota, and Balkrishna Sama took Nepali to the level of other world languages. The contribution of expatriate writers outside Nepal, especially in Darjeeling and Varanasi in India, is also notable.

Number of speakers

According to the 2011 national census, 44.6 percent of the population of Nepal speaks Nepali as the first language.[11] and 32.8 percent speaks Nepali as a second language[12]. The Ethnologue reports 12,300,000 speakers within Nepal (from the 2011 census).[12] As per the 2011 Census of India, there were a total of 2,926,168 native speakers of the language in India, amounting to 0.25% of the total population.

Nepali is traditionally spoken in the hilly regions of Nepal. The language is prominently used in governmental usages in Nepal and is the everyday language of the local population. The exclusive use of Nepali in the court system and by the government of Nepal is being challenged. Gaining recognition for other languages of Nepal was one of the goals of the decade large Maoist insurgency in Nepal.[13]

In Bhutan, native Nepali speakers, known as *Lhotshampa*, are estimated at about 35 percent [14] of the population. This number includes displaced Bhutanese refugees, with unofficial estimates of the ethnic Bhutanese refugee population as high as 30 to 40 percent, constituting a majority in the south (about 242,000 people).[15]

There are 2.9 million Nepali language speakers in India.[16]

	Individual codes: `npi` – Nepali `dty` – Doteli
Glottolog	`nepa1254` (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/nepa1254)[3] `nepa1252` (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/nepa1252) duplicate code[4]
Linguasphere	`59-AAF-d`

World map with significant Nepali language speakers
Dark Blue: Main official language,
Light blue: One of the official languages,
Red: Places with significant population or greater than 20% but without official recognition.

History

The oldest discovered inscription in the Nepali language is believed to be the Dullu Inscription, which is believed to have been written around the reign of King Bhupal Damupal around the year 981 CE. It is believed that the language bore a lot of similarities with other Northwest Indian languages like Punjabi, Sindhi and Lahanda. It's believed that there is some mention of the Khasa language in texts like Manusmriti, Rajatarangini and the Puranas. The Khashas were documented to have ruled over a vast territory comprising what is now western Nepal, parts of Garhwal and Kumaon in northern India, and some parts of southwestern Tibet. King Ashoka Challa (1255–78 CE) is believed to have proclaimed himself Khasha-Rajadhiraja (emperor of the Khashas) in a copper-plate inscription found in Bodh Gaya, and several other copper-plates in the ancient Nepali language have been traced back to the descendants of the King.

Bhanubhakta Acharya, *Aadi Kavi* in Nepali language literature

The currently popular variant of Nepali is believed to have originated around 500 years ago with the mass migration of a branch of Khas people from the Karnali-Bheri-Seti eastward to settle in lower valleys of the Karnali and the Gandaki basin that were well-suited to rice cultivation. Over the centuries, different dialects of the Nepali language with distinct influences from Sanskrit, Maithili, Hindi and Bengali are believed to have emerged across different regions of the current-day Nepal and Uttarakhand, making Khasa the lingua franca.

However, the institutionalization of the Nepali language is believed to have started with the Shah kings of Gorkha Kingdom, in the modern day Gorkha district of Nepal. In 1559 AD, a prince of Lamjung, Dravya Shah established himself on the throne of Gorkha with the help of local Khas and Magars. He raised an army of khas people under the command of Bhagirath Panta. Later, in the late 18th century, his descendant, Prithvi Narayan Shah, raised and modernised an army of Chhetri, Thakuri, Magars and Gurung people among others and set out to conquer and consolidate dozens of small principalities in the Himalayas. Since Gorkha had replaced the original Khas homeland, Khaskura was redubbed *Gorkhali* "language of the Gorkhas.

One of the most notable military achievements of Prithvi Narayan Shah was the conquest of Kathmandu Valley. This region was called *Nepal* at the time. After the overthrowing of the Malla rulers, Kathmandu was established as Prithvi Narayan's new capital.

Copper Inscription by King of Doti, *Raika* Mandhata Shahi, at Saka Era 1612 (1747 BS) in old *Khas* language using Devanagari script

The Khas people originally referred to their language as *Khas kurā* ("Khas speech"), which was also known as *Parbatiya* (or *Parbattia* or *Paharia*, meaning language of the hill country).[17][18] The Newar people used the term "Gorkhali" as a name for this language, as they identified it with the Gorkhali conquerors. The Gorkhalis themselves started using this term to refer to their language at a later stage.[19] The census of India prior to independence used the term *Naipali* at least from 1901 to 1951, the 1961 census replacing it with *Nepali*.[20][21]

Expansion – particularly to the north, west, and south – brought the growing state into conflict with the British and the Chinese. This led to wars that trimmed back the territory to an area roughly corresponding to Nepal's present borders. After the Gorkha conquests, the Kathmandu valley or *Nepal* became the new center of politics. As the entire conquered territory of the Gorkhas ultimately became *Nepal*, in the early decades of the 20th century, Gorkha language activists in India, especially Darjeeling and Varanasi, began petitioning Indian universities to

adopt the name 'Nepali' for the language.[22] Also in an attempt to disassociate himself with his Khas background, the Rana monarch Jung Bahadur Rana decreed that the term Gorkhali be used instead of *Khas kurā* to describe the language. Meanwhile, the British Indian administrators had started using the term "Nepal" to refer to the Gorkha kingdom. In the 1930s, Nepal government also adopted this term fully. Subsequently, the Khas language came to be known as "Nepali language".[1]

Nepali is spoken indigenously over most of Nepal west of the Gandaki River, then progressively less further to the east.[23]

The Damupal Inscription in Dullu, Dailekh

Dialects

Dialects of Nepali include Acchami, Baitadeli, Bajhangi, Bajurali, Bheri, Dadeldhuri, Dailekhi, Darchulali, Darchuli, Doteli, Gandakeli, Humli, Purbeli, and Soradi.[12] Jhapali and Syangjali are closely related languages.[12]

Phonology

Nepali is written in Devanagari script. Primarily a system of transliteration from the Indian scripts, [and] based in turn upon Sanskrit" (cf. IAST), these are the salient features of it: subscript dots for retroflex consonants; macrons for etymologically, contrastively long vowels; *h* denoting aspirated plosives. Tildes denote nasalized vowels.

Vowels and consonants are outlined in the tables below. Hovering the mouse cursor over them will reveal the appropriate IPA symbol, while in the rest of the article hovering the mouse cursor over underlined forms will reveal the appropriate English translation.

Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i/ī		u/ū
Mid	e		o
Open		a/ā	a

Consonants

	Bilabial		Labio-dental	Dental		Alveolar		Retroflex		Post-alv./ Palatal	Velar		Glottal	
Plosive	p ph	b bh		t th	d dh			ṭ ṭh	ḍ ḍh		k kh	g gh		
Affricate						c ch	j jh							
Nasal	m					n		ṇ		ñ	ṅ			
Fricative						s		ṣ		ś				h
Tap or Flap						r		ɽ ɽh						
Approximant			v							y				
Lateral approximant						l								

Vowels

Monophthongs

Nepali vowel phonemes

	Front	Central	Back
High	i ĩ		u ũ
Close-mid	e ẽ		o
Open-mid			ʌ ʌ̃
Open		a ã	

Nepali distinguishes six oral vowels and five nasal vowels. /o/ does not have a phonemic nasal counterpart, although it is often in free variation with [õ].

Diphthongs

Nepali has ten diphthongs: /ui/, /iu/, /ei/, /eu/, /oi/, /ou/, /ʌi/, /ʌu/, /ai/, and /au/.

Consonants

Nepali consonant phonemes

	Bilabial		Dental		Alveolar		Retroflex		Palatal	Velar		Glottal
Nasal	m				n		ɳ		ɲ	ŋ		
Plosive/Affricate	p pʰ	b bʰ	t tʰ	d dʱ	ts tsʰ	dz dzʱ	ʈ ʈʰ	ɖ ɖʱ		k kʰ	g gʱ	
Fricative					s		ʂ		ɕ			ɦ
Rhotic					r							
Approximant	(w)				l				(j)			

[j] and [w] are nonsyllabic allophones of [i] and [u], respectively. Every consonant except [j], [w], /l/, and /ɦ/ has a geminate counterpart between vowels. /ɳ/ and /ʃ/ also exist in some loanwords such as /baɳ/ बाण "arrow" and /nareʃ/ नरेश "king", but these sounds are sometimes replaced with native Nepali phonemes.

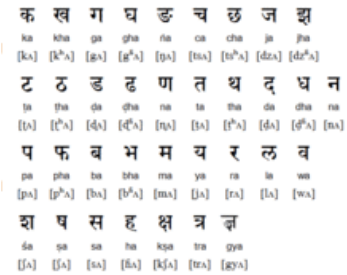
Final schwas may or may not be preserved in speech. The following rules can be followed to figure whether or not Nepali words retain the final schwa. Nepali retains the schwa for the final syllable if:

1. The syllable is a conjunct. अन्त (*anta*, end), सम्बन्ध (*sambandha*, relation), श्रेष्ठ (*shrestha*, greatest/ a last name) Exceptions: conjuncts such as ञ्ज ञ्च in मञ्च (*manc*, stage) गञ्ज (*ganj*, city) and occasionally the last name पन्त (*panta*/*pant*).
2. For any verb form the final schwa is always retained unless the schwa cancelling halanta is present. हुन्छ (*huncha*, it happens), भएर (*bhaera*, in happening so/ therefore), गएछ (*gaecha*, he apparently went) but छन् (*chan*, they are), गइन् (*gain*, she went). Meanings may change with the wrong orthography: गइन (*gaina*, she didn't go) vs. गइन् (*gain*, she went).
3. Adverbs, onomatopoeia and postpositions usually maintain the schwa and if they don't a halanta is acquired: अब (*aba*, now), तिर (*tira*, towards), आज (*āja*, today) vs. सिम्सिम् (*simsim*, drizzle), झन् (*jhan*, more)
4. Few exceptional nouns such as: दुख (*dukha*, suffering), सुख (*sukha*, pleasure)

Grammar

Nepali is an SOV language. There are three major levels or gradation of honorific- low, medium and high. Low honorific is used where no respect is due, medium honorific is used to signify equal status or neutrality and high honorific signifies respect. There is also a separate highest level honorific, that was used to refer to members of the Royal family, and by the Royals among themselves. It is still in use by elite dynasties like Shahs,Thapas, Ranas, Pandes, etc. and is increasingly being embraced by the elite class in general.

Writing



Nepali letters, transliteration and their pronunciation

Numbers

Nepali numbers

Numeral		Written	IAST	IPA	Etymology
0	०	शुन्य/सुन्ना	*śūnya*	/ʃunjʌ/	Sanskrit *śūnya* (शून्य)
1	१	एक	*ek*	/ek/	Sanskrit *eka* (एक)
2	२	दुई	*duī*	/d̪ui/	Sanskrit *dvi* (द्वि)
3	३	तीन	*tīn*	/t̪in/	Sanskrit *tri* (त्रि)
4	४	चार	*cār*	/t͡sar/	Sanskrit *catúr* (चतुर्)
5	५	पाँच	*pām̐c*	/pãt͡s/	Sanskrit *pañca* (पञ्च)
6	६	छ	*cha*	/t͡sʰʌ/	Sanskrit *ṣáṣ* (षष्)
7	७	सात	*sat*	/sat̪/	Sanskrit *saptá* (सप्त)
8	८	आठ	*āṭh*	/aʈʰ/	Sanskrit *aṣṭá* (अष्ट)
9	९	नौ	*nau*	/nʌu/	Sanskrit *náva* (नव)
10	१०	दश	*daś*	/d̪ʌs/	Sanskrit *dáśa* दश
11	११	एघार	*eghār*	/egʰar/	
12	१२	बाह्र	*bāhr*	/barʰ/	
20	२०	बीस	*vis*	/bis/	
21	२१	एक्काइस	*ekkāis*	/ekkais/	
22	२२	बाइस	*bāis*	/bais/	
100	१००	एक सय	*ek say*	/ek sʌi/	
1 000	१,०००	एक हजार	*ek hajār*	/ek ɦʌd͡zar/	
10 000	१०,०००	दश हजार	*daś hajār*	/d̪ʌs ɦʌd͡zar/	
100 000	१,००,०००	एक लाख	*ek lākh*	/ek lakʰ/	See lakh
1 000 000	१०,००,०००	दश लाख	*daś lākh*	/d̪ʌs lakʰ/	
10 000 000	१,००,००,०००	एक करोड	*ek karoḍ*	/ek kʌroɽ/	See crore
100 000 000	१०,००,००,०००	दश करोड	*daś karoḍ*		
1 000 000 000	१,००,००,००,०००	एक अरब	*ek arab*		
10 000 000 000	१०,००,००,००,०००	दश अरब	*das arab*		
10^{12}	१०^{१२}	एक खरब	*ek kharab*		
10^{14}	१०^{१४}	एक नील	*ek nil*		
10^{16}	१०^{१६}	एक पद्म	*ek padma*		
10^{18}	१०^{१८}	एक शंख	*ek shankha*		

The numbering system has roots in Vedic numbering system, found in the ancient scripture of Ramayana.

See also

- Languages of Nepal
- Vikram Samvat
- Nepali literature
- Nepali phonology
- Numbers in Nepali language

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External links

- Nepali language (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nepali-language) at Encyclopædia Britannica
- Omniglot - Nepali Language (http://www.omniglot.com/writing/nepali.htm)

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